JUSTICE – THE FLIP SIDE OF SUFFERING

AN ESSAY BY

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SUFFERING AND DEATH

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) 1008 says: *"Death is a consequence of sin. --- death entered the world on account of man's sin.* (i.e., Adam and Eve, Genesis 1-3) *Even though man's nature is mortal, God had destined him not to die. Death was therefore contrary to the plans of God, the Creator, and entered the world as a consequence of sin."*

Similarly, but I didn't find a direct quotation in CCC, the Church teaches that suffering, like death, is a consequence of sin. According to the Church, without the original sin of Adam and Eve, humankind would not suffer, ever, at all. We literally would live in paradise.

But I disagree with that teaching. I'm trying to base my faith on objective truth, and the above is not consistent with the reality of God's creation of the cosmos, earth and mankind as discussed below.

To the extent that we believe in God and the angels (which I do firmly), the angels were created by God long before the creation of the cosmos. Lucifer was one of God's most powerful angels and, with his God-given free will, chose ego and greed over love and became the opposite of God's love, hence banished into hell. That's the real basis for 'original sin,' Lucifer's (we now know as Satan or just the devil) fall from God.

Consequently, and still long before creation of the cosmos, suffering existed in hell as a consequence of Satan's evil choices. Satan's sin, not man's, is the real basis for all suffering.

Fast forward to the creation of the earth and life on earth, still long before mankind. God created all living things to be 'mortal,' i.e., naturally and necessarily facing death, having nothing to do with the consequences of sin. And still long before the creation of mankind, all animal life was mortal and the process of dying included, in many cases, a high level of suffering. Dying has, from the moment of creation, been painful. We don't apply the idea of suffering to plants that die, just to animals and mankind. But suffering and death are naturally a necessary part of life itself.

Likewise, God created many natural causes of death: failing health and diseases of all kinds, natural events like earthquakes, fires, storms, etc., and of accidents of all kinds. As such, sin alone does not cause such death and suffering – it's entirely a result of God's natural yet mortal creation. We live in an environment that naturally causes suffering and death.

But then God created humankind with the same free will that he gave to the angels, the free will that allowed Satan to choose evil, and subsequently, our freedom to do likewise.

As a result of mankind's free will, unnatural and unjust suffering and death are caused by individuals, organizations, cultures and nations, one against another, perhaps sometimes justly, but many times out of sheer evil intentions. War, genocide, persecution, violence, physical and mental harm, discrimination, etc., are all human caused and freely chosen. Doing Satan's work instead of God's.

JUSTICE
According to the Church, CCC1807: *Justice is the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor. --- Justice toward men disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good. The just man, often mentioned in the Sacred Scripture, is distinguished by habitual right thinking and the uprightness of his conduct toward his neighbor.*

Wikipedia provides the following description:
In its broadest sense, justice is the idea that individuals should be treated fairly. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, the most plausible candidate for a core definition comes from the Institutes of Justinian, a 6th-century codification of Roman law, where justice is defined as "the constant and perpetual will to render to each his due."

A society where justice has been achieved would be one in which individuals receive what they "deserve". The interpretation of what "deserve" means draws on a variety of fields and philosophical branches including ethics, rationality, law, religion, and fairness. The state may pursue justice by operating courts and enforcing their rulings.

By coincidence as I'm writing this, the readings at Mass today speak of justice:
Malachi 3:19-20 *For to, the day is coming, blazing like an oven, when all the proud and all evildoers will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire, leaving them neither root nor branch, says the Lord of hosts. But for you who fear my name, there will arise the sun of justice with its healing rays.*

Psalm 95:9 *Before the Lord who comes, who comes to govern the earth, to govern the world with justice and the peoples with fairness.*

There are many, many other references throughout the Bible that provide messages about justice.

JUSTICE AFTER DEATH

The fundamental principle we understand as Christians is that justice is not complete in this life but that we will be held fully accountable at judgment after death when suffering is balanced with justice.

For those who have suffered more in this life than justice requires, their suffering should be complete; they have already paid the price (with many other factors also taken into account). Suffering is indeed a pathway to heaven. (but the most important pathway to heaven is love)

For those who have suffered less in this life than justice demands, their judgment will necessarily include an amount of suffering relative to their shortcomings (again with other factors taken into account).

The principle is that everyone's judgment will be a balance of the suffering that they have endured in this life and the accountability for the harm that they have done. True justice will be received, good or bad.

But the real core of this argument is that the injustices in this life due to the vast suffering that is being inflicted every day, those who have inflicted suffering on others in any way will be held fully accountable as justice demands and they will suffer comparable to those who suffered under their willful intent. Suffering will be their justice.

The clear message to all those individuals in government, institutions, religions, and cultures who unjustly inflict suffering on others, be they immigrants or poor or marginalized or of different religions or cultures, will themselves suffer whatever justice demands, if not in this life, certainly after their death.

What's more, it's not God's judgment that will cause their suffering – it's the guilt held within their own souls. Justice is inherent within our own being; we cannot avoid it. Pay me now or pay me later, either way justice will prevail.

The only way to make sense of the current treatment of immigrants by this administration is to recognize that the suffering of the victims is part of their pathway to heaven, and those who inflict that suffering, from the top to the bottom, will indeed face consequential and comparable suffering, perhaps their pathway to hell.

We pray fervently every day for those who are suffering, for relief of their pain, for compassion and respect for their rights, for resources to meet their needs, and for God’s blessings of support and resilience. We also pray for conversion of spirit for those who inflict suffering. Be instruments of love and mercy, not of hatred and suffering. But on the flip side of suffering, we pray for God’s justice on behalf of all those who are suffering at their hands.